UNIVERSTIRY OF ALBERTA

HNAT KHOTKEVYCH AND THE PROBLEM OF DECADENCE IN UKRAINIAN LITERATURE

by

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A thesis submited to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

UKRAINIAN LITERATURE

DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 1996

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ISBN 0-612-18163-4

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Name of Author: Oksana Krys

Title of Thesis: Hnat Khotkevych and the Problem of Decadence in Ukrainian Literature

Degree: Master of Arts

Year the Degree Granted: 1996

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Abstract

This thesis explores the decadent features in the early prose of Hnat Khotkevych (1877-1938). It argues that, despite his refusal to embrace the designation "decadent," such features are present in his work. They are eloquent testimony to his interest in modernist themes and formal experimentation.

In the first chapter the uses of the terms symbolism and decadence are examined from the perspective of modern-day criticism.

The second chapter investigates the definitions and uses of the term "decadent" in Ukrainian criticism of the early twentieth century.

The third chapter is a close analysis of decadent features in Khotkevych's collection *Poeziia v prozi.*

Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge the individual contributions of my supervisors Dr. Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj and Dr. Natalia Pylypuik in assisting me to complete this project. Dr. Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj's suggestions, attention to details, and patience and Dr. Natalia Pylypiuk's encouragement, stimulating comments, and scholarly assistance helped me with this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

In Ukrainian literary criticism, Hnat Khotkevych has a reputation of being a decadent writer. This characterization was accorded to him in the 1900's after the publication of his *Poeziia v prozi* (Prose Poetry, 1902).[1] Khotkevych was singled out for the unconventional presence of a decadent style and themes, which was believed to lead to the "deterioration" of Ukrainian literature. Critics also dubbed him a "pornographer," and described his works as meaningless and useless because they did not perform the social function traditionally expected from literature.

Historically, "decadence" has carried negative connotations, implying decline and decay. In Khotkevych's day this was the dominant view held by practitioners of Ukrainian culture. The other connotations of decadence, such as aestheticism and idealism -- attributed to the closely related phenomenon of symbolism -- were accepted by a few critics, among them, Ivan Franko. Nevertheless, in Ukraine even the "symbolist" elements of decadence such as emotionalism and subjectivism were rejected by the anti-modernist critics Ivan Nechui-Levyts'kyi, Serhii Iefremov, and Vasyl' Shchurat. They deployed

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[1] See, Іван Нечуй-Левицький, "Українська декадентщина," *Зібрання творів у десяти томах* т. 10 (Київ: Наукова думка, 1955); Сергій Єфремов, "В поисках новой красоты," *Літературно-критичні статті* (Київ: Дніпро, 1993).

the term "decadence" to condemn both the darker, negative and pessimistic aspects of symbolism/modernism, as well as its experimental and idealistic facets.

When reading Khotkevych's contemporaries, it becomes apparent that at the time the designation "decadent" was not applied uniformly to convey one universal meaning. Within one and the same text, some critics would detect decadence, while others perceived something less threatening, i.e., symbolism. The limiting and non-specific definition of decadence is puzzling. Critics often turned to this term when governed by their emotions and guided by their personal experience and background. Often this led to the misinterpretation of new works, and the facile and uncritical labeling of writers as decadent. For me, a modern reader, this poses a problem. The fact that the application of the term "decadent" varied from critic to critic not only confuses me, but leads me to question the validity of critical assessments expressed by Ivan Franko, Serhii Iefremov and Ivan Nechui-Levyts'kyi, especially concerning Hnat Khotkevych's early works. Consequently, I ask what was the individual critic's understanding and use of the word "decadent," and did Khotkevych's early works indeed possess a decadent style and convey only a decadent meaning.

The main objective of my thesis is to test and challenge the opinions these critics held with respect to Hnat Khotkevych's oeuvre. With this purpose in mind, I will first examine symbolism and decadence -- as they are understood by literary criticism today -- and investigate the similarities and differences between them. I will then apply the results of my investigation toward a working definition of decadence. Subsequently, I will assess the criticism directed at "decadent" writers -- Khotkevych, in particular -- by analyzing the meaning and uses of the term "decadent" by his contemporaries. In doing so I hope to reveal the reaction of modernists to the term. Finally, I will trace the presence and relationship of symbolist and decadent features as they emerge in an early collection by Hnat Khotkevych, namely *Poeziia v prozi* (1902).

Before I turn to the task at hand, I offer the following outline of Hnat Khotkevych's biography and creative output.[2] Hnat Khotkevych (1877-1938)

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[2] This outline of Khotkevych's biography is drawn from the following sources: *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* Danylo Husar Struk ed. vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 491; Степан Ковальчук, "Гнат Хоткевич і його повість 'Камінна Душа,'" післямова. В кн. Гнат Хоткевич, *Камінна душа* (Київ: Державне видавництво художньої літератури, 1958); Федір Погребенник, "Гнат Хоткевич і його історична проза," післямова. В кн. Гнат Хоткевич, *Авірон Довбуш Оповідання* (Київ: Дніпро, 1990); Федір Погребенник, "Гнат Хоткевич," передмова. В кн. Гнат Хоткевич, *Твори в двох томах* т.1 (Київ: Дніпро, 1966).

was a multifaceted individual. He was a writer, scholar, translator, composer, musician, actor, and theater director.

After graduating from the Kharkiv Technological Institute in 1900, he worked as a railway engineer. Politically persecuted for being one of the leaders of a railwaymen's strike in Liubotyn in 1905, he was forced to emigrate to Galicia in 1906, where he lived in various places until 1912. In Galicia he studied folklore and was involved in theatrical work that led to the establishment in 1910 of the Hutsul Theater in Krasnoilia, Kosiv county. Upon returning to Kharkiv, Khotkevych continued engaging in the life of the theater. In 1913 he became the editor of the literary journal *Visnyk kul'tury i zhyttia*, an activity that led to more political persecution and resulted in his exile to Voronezh, Russia, in 1915. From 1920 to 1928 he taught Ukrainian literature and language at the Zoological Technical College of Derkachi. Subsequently, he gave bandura lessons at the Kharkiv Institute of Music and Drama. He is the author of a bandura manual (*Pidruchnyk hry na banduri*, 1909), and the composer of a number of songs (*Baida, Sofron*, and *Nechai*).

The literary output of Hnat Khotkevych is large and diverse. He wrote short-stories, novels and prose-sketches. His first known short story is "Hruzynka" (The Georgian Girl), which appeared in 1897 in the Lviv journal

Zoria. In 1898 Khotkevych became an active contributor to *Literaturno-Naukovyi Vistnyk*. From its very beginning in 1897, this journal devoted much space to Western European literature. It published translations and review articles on Maupassant, Verlaine, Kipling, D'Annunzio, Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann, Schnitzler and others. Exposure to these writers influenced Khotkevych's literary endeavors. Their impact is discernible in his 1902 collection *Poeziia v prozi* (Prose Poetry). In the early 1900's Hnat Khotkevych continued to publish in the journal *Literaturno-Naukovyi Vistnyk*, as well as in such almanacs and miscellanies as *Za Krasoiu, Arho,* and *Bahattia*.[3]

The political changes that transpired in the Russian Empire between 1906-1910 resonate thematically in the plays Khotkevych wrote during this period: "Lykholittia" (Time of Calamity, 1906); "Vony" (They, 1909); and "Na zaliznytsi" (On the Railroad, 1910). During his stay in Galicia, Khotkevych studied Hutsul folklore and the life-style of the Hutsuls. This interest is reflected in his well known lyrical novel *Kaminna dusha* (The Stone Soul, 1911); the play "Dovbush" (1909); and the collection of short

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[3] During 1897-1900 Khotkevych publishes such works as *Bludnyi syn* (The Prodigal Son, 1898) and *Ridvianyi vechir* (Christmas Eve, 1899); the cycle *Zhyttievi analohii* (Life's Analogies, 1897-1901). See, *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* Danylo Husar Struk ed. vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 491.

stories *Hirs'ki akvareli* (Mountain Watercolors, 1914). Hutsul lore also inspired his "Hutsul's'ki obrazy" (Hutsul Portraits) which, however, remained unpublished until 1931. Upon his return to Kharkiv in 1913, Khotkevych began working on the novel *Berestechko*, parts of which were published that year in the Kiev journal *Ukrains'ka khata*. In 1917 his novel *Aviron* appeared.

In the 1920's and early 1930's Khotkevych devoted much time to research and translating. He translated Kalidasa's play "Shakuntala" and works by Shakespeare, Schiller, and Hugo. He also wrote several critical studies, including "Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda" (1920); "Narodnyi i seredn'ovichnyi teatr v Halychyni" (The Folk and Medieval Theater of Galicia, 1924); "Teatr 1848 r." (Theater Life in 1848, 1932). In 1930 he published the first part of his manual *Pidruchnyk hry na banduri*. In this period Khotkevych also wrote and published the plays "O polku Ihorevim" (About Ihor's Regiment, 1926) and "Selo v 1905 rotsi" (Village in 1905, 1929), and the tetralogy *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* (1929). In the early 1930's he finished writing the novel *Dovbush*. At this time he began writing a tetralogy about Taras Shevchenko.

By the 1920's Khotkevych was a respected figure in Ukrainian literature. In 1922 Ukrainians celebrated the 25th anniversary of his literary career. That year the novel *Kaminna dusha* was republished, and between 1929-1930 the Kharkiv publishing house "Rukh" issued an eight volume collection of his works. The eminent literary critic O. Bilets'kyi expressed nothing but respect for Khotkevych's oeuvre:

> Ваша творчість була б помітною в будь-якій літературі, і, незалежно від моїх українських симпатій, я не міг би не оцінити поетичної сили "Богдана Хмельницького," широти і глибини зображення в повісті про Шевченка, проблемності і гостроти ситуацій в тих драмах, які я читав колись в рукописах і які до сих пір пам'ятаю.[4]

In later years Khotkevych became politically suspect and, eventually, he suffered persecution. His last novel *Dovbush* was never published, and his monumental work on Taras Shevchenko was never completed. After 1930 his works were denied publication and, thus, many of them remained unknown to the general public. During the Yezhov terror Khotkevych was arrested on September 29, 1938 and shot on October 8.[5] Partially rehabilitated after Stalin's death, his works appeared in 1966 in a two-volume collection.

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[4] Федір Погребенник, "Гнат Хоткевич і його історична проза," післямова. В кн. Гнат Хоткевич, *Авірон Довбуш Оповідання* (Київ: Дніпро, 1990) 544.

[5] *З порога смерті. Письменники України - жертви сталінських репресій* О. Г. Мусієнко, упорядник. Випуск перший. (Київ: Радянський письменник, 1991) 441-444.

However, it was not until 1990 that a collection of his historical novels and short stories appeared under the title *Aviron. Dovbush. Opovidannia.* Important as it was, this Ukrainian publication did not represent Khotkevych's entire legacy. Subsequently, "Dnipro" publishers announced their intention to issue in 1992-94 five volumes of his collected works. This promised edition, as far as I was capable to ascertain, was never realized due to the economic hardships.

CHAPTER 1

EUROPEAN SYMBOLISM AND DECADENCE

Both Symbolism and Decadence derive from what is generally understood as the broader movement of Aestheticism. Inasmuch as they tended to react toward and against many of the same things, it is difficult to separate these two concepts. In the history of critical idioms, as Anna Balakian explains, Symbolism and Decadence are considered to have a "dichotomous" relationship:

> It is assumed that they coexisted in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the former [Symbolism] relating primarily to poetry, the latter [Decadence] to prose. Symbolism was presumably concerned with aesthetics, and Decadence reflected the deterioration of a system of ethics.[6]

Thus, it may be useful to begin with a definition of Aestheticism. This was a movement that rejected the disturbing world of urban industrialism. Therefore, it turned towards the stylization of forms found in nature. This revealed that the principal interests of Aestheticism were not with the world of external objects, but with the spiritual and material significance of art. As

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[6] Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement* (New York: Random House, 1967) 156.

Walter Hamilton points out: "one of the first principles of Aestheticism is that all the fine arts are intimately related to one another."[7]

One of the early manifestations of Aestheticism was the Pre-Raphaelite movement in England. Pre-Raphaelitism combines Realism and Idealism by concentrating on the precision of image in the service of a symbol or idea.[8] Reacting to Naturalism, the Pre-Raphaelites nevertheless retained an extra-aesthetic purposiveness in their art. However, whereas the Naturalists concentrated upon the details of material existence, the Pre-Raphaelites were willing to incorporate supernatural, symbolic, and fantastic elements in their work. The Decadent attitude is believed to have emerged from the interaction of these two movements, for it combined Aesthetic idealism with an interest in the facts that appealed to the Naturalists.[9]

According to Reed, Aestheticism -- as a movement -- recognizes the connection between beauty and evil.[10] Decadence stresses the interrelationship of virtue and vice, beauty and ugliness. Symbolism, on the other hand, separates them by converting offensive phenomenal facts into

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[7] Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1882) 98.

[8] John Reed, *Decadent Style* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985) 13.

[9] Reed, 13. This change is epitomized in the most central of all Decadent writers, Huysmans, who began as a Naturalist but achieved fame with *A rebours*.

[10] Reed, 14.

symbols for an immaterial reality. Symbolism, therefore, is more closely related to Aestheticism. Reed emphasizes that Symbolism is the direct descendent of Aestheticism and Art-for-Art's Sake, while Decadence is "an illegitimate by-blow sired by Naturalism upon Aestheticism."[11]

In literature, Decadence is usually considered to be a late stage of Romanticism, a transition to Modernism that was overshadowed by the more influential Symbolist movement.[12] Both Symbolism and Decadence use symbols, reject the contemporary world, and emphasize the longing for another sphere of being -- aesthetic, ideal, and supernatural. However, Symbolism permits greater experimentation in form, abandons meaning in favour of suggestion, and aspires to a higher domain beyond the material world.[13] Decadence, on the other hand, takes from Darwinism Schopenhauer's sense of struggle and illusion, rather than an optimistic notion

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[11] Reed, 14.

[12] The summary that follows is based on: John Reed, *Decadent Style* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985); A. E. Carter, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature 1830-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958); Richard Gilman, *Decadence* (New York: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1979); Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement* (New York: Random House, 1967); Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination 1880-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); (*Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1991); *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[13] Reed, 15.

of material progress, and uses form to imply a world in which no escape is possible except through delirium, oblivion or death.[14]

Overall, the outlined similarities and difference between Symbolism and Decadence demonstrate not only their shared roots in Aestheticism, but also flesh out the specific characteristics that makes Decadence a discrete phenomenon.

THE TERM "DECADENCE"

The application of the term "decadence" has a long history. The meaning of the term, however, has evolved over time under the impact of each generation's cultural, social and political tendencies.[15] Until the nineteenth century the term "decadence" simply signified a 'break down' or 'collapse.' *Decadentia* derives from the medieval Latin verb *decadere*, meaning 'to decay.' A. E. Carter, tracing the meaning and the use of the term, found that

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[14] Reed, 15.

[15] A. E. Carter, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature 1830-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958).

its first application in Du Cange[16] was synonymous with *lapsus* and *ruina*, which were used to describe the decay of farms and mills.[17]

Throughout the eighteenth century "decadence" was used to characterize a life style involving luxury and vice. Critics also applied the epithet 'decadent' to describe any work of which they disapproved (a tendency we will find among Ukrainian critics).

In the middle and at the end of the nineteenth century, "decadence," when implying "deterioration," took on a more culturally specific meaning. Not only writers were often designated as "decadent artists," but the age they lived in was also called decadent. The European press spoke of decadent writers as a "noisy and motley crew."[18] In response to contemporary critics, Baudelaire defended decadence, arguing that:

> What hostile criticism called a decadent style was an essentially modern style, more colorful and worthier of imitation than a classical style, since it was better suited to represent contemporary life.[19]

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[16] Du Cange, Charles du Fresne (1610-1688) one of the great French universal scholars of the 17th century, who wrote dictionaries of medieval Latin and Greek using a historical approach to language that pointed toward modern linguistic criticism. His masterworks are: *Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis* (1678; "A Glossary for Writers of Middle and Low Latin") and *Glossarium ad Scriptores Mediae et Infimae Graecitiatis* (1688; "A Glossary for Middle and Low Greek"). See, *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* 15th ed. vol. 2 (Chicago: Macropaedia, 1990) 801.

[17] To reproduce the use of the term "decadence" I will rely on the finding of A. E. Carter. See, Carter, 144.

[18] *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2 ed. vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 318.

In 1889, the British *Daily News* intimated its understanding of decadence and, at the same time, revealed the term's ambiguity by making a comparison with Rabelais: "A wonderful piece of 'decadent' French, in a queer new style, as if Rabelais's Limousin had been reborn, with a fresh manner of being unintelligible."[20]

The vagueness of the term was conceded by the critic Arthur Symons who stated in 1899 that Decadence lacked a precise definition and created problems for literary analysis:

> Something which is vaguely called Decadence had come into being. That name, rarely used with any precise meaning, was usually either hurled as a reproach or hurled back as a defiance. It pleased some young men in various countries to call themselves Decadents, with all the thrill of unsatisfied virtue masquerading as uncomprehended vice ...[21]

Although the meaning of the term and attitudes toward it have changed over the years, the modern concept of decadence is usually associated with the exploration of Decadent ideas in the works of Joris-Karl Huysmans (*A rebours*, 1884), Oscar Wilde (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1891), and

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[19] *The Oxford*, 318.

[20] *The Oxford*, 318.

[21] Arthor Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1919) 4.

Charles Baudelaire (*Les Fleurs du mal,* 1857). Today, in literary criticism, Decadence is seen as a transition to Modernism:

> [Decadence] was an art painfully making a transition from the belief that art means and matters in itself to one that knows it does not yet and cannot abandon its subject, instead making its style an embodiment of the very transition it represents. It is a major first step toward what we call Modernism.[22]

As Reed points out, Decadent art emphasizes tantalization and provocation. Because the object of desire is unattainable, this art dwells upon the pain that accompanies longing until the pain itself becomes an object of desire. As long as the pain is sustained, the object of desire is not lost.[23] Decadent protagonists portrayed individuals who found nothing of meaning or value in the external world. Finding no faithful reflection in nature, the Decadent artist transformed nature through artifice; he attempted to fashion nature into an ornamentation of the self. As A. Carter points out:

> Artificiality ... is the chief characteristic of decadence ... By voluntary contradiction of the nature-cult, writers were able to see all the traditional Romantic themes in a new light and new perspective.[24]

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[22] Reed, 242.

[23] Reed, 17.

[24] Carter, 25.

The Decadents were described as pessimists fascinated by a remote past and disenchanted by the present. In the opinion of critics, the decadents were lured into the future by "hopelessly elegant dreams without the means and determination to achieve them."[25] The inevitable frustration that resulted led the Decadents to melancholy obsession and to self-isolation. Their insistence on will as opposed to emotion, explains Carter, created a new type of sensibility, which soon became embodied in the figure of the dandy with his self-mastery, intellectualism, ennui, satiety and perverse obsessions.[26]

Decadent writing shared with much of *fin de siecle* art a discontent with the present and a longing for transformation. It was a self-conscious, intellectual art that acknowledged the power of the irrational. It was an art that pursued an ideal while disbelieving in man's ability to achieve ideals. Its ornate elaboration was a means of diverting attention from the void at its center; yet, ironically, that very elaboration enforced a focus on the nothingness it embroidered.[27] Decadence, although preoccupied with traditional forms, undermined those forms. Today, decadence is characterized

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[25] Carter, 25.

[26] Carter, 25.

[27] Carter, 26.

by aestheticism, great refinement of style, and a marked tendency toward the artificial and abnormal in content. It is such definitions of the term that I will deploy in my analysis of Khotkevych's works.

CHAPTER 2

UKRAINIAN CRITICS AND WRITERS: CONFLICTING VIEWS ON DECADENCE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

European trends at the turn of the century introduced the term "decadent" into Ukrainian writings of the period. The term appears in the discussions of such authors as Ivan Nechui-Levyts'kyi, Serhii Iefremov, Ivan Franko, Vasyl' Shchurat, Ahatanhel Kryms'kyi, and Lesia Ukrainka. From the beginning, however, the idea of decadence, and specifically French decadence, was censured by the majority of tradition-oriented critics and, surprisingly, by most Modernist writers. It appears that the term was universally identified merely with the negative connotations of decline and degeneration. Its broader and more positive applications (as a sign of modernity, experimentation and the new, subjective sensibility) did not acquired currency among Ukrainian intellectuals.

Ivan Nechui-Levyts'kyi characterized French decadence as a contagious modern trend spreading throughout Europe. He believed that

decadent ideas were particularly scandalous and obscene because they sought to destroy the existing moral order and to excuse literature from its traditional responsibilities. Nechui-Levyts'kyi assessed modernity strictly in negative terms. He included symbolism and a multitude of evils, such as eroticism and pornography, among the constituent elements of "decadence":

> ... декаденство в усяких його складових частках: еротизмом, символізмом, еротоманією, соромітчиною і сливе порнографією. Усе це якось поспіталось докупи і приплелось до ідеї визвольницького сьогочасного рушення...[28]

For Nechui-Levyts'kyi decadence was a trend that could not be reconciled with the traditions of Realism and Populism. While accepting it as a normal development in well-established European literatures (such as the French, for example), he nonetheless dismissed it as a "luxury" and as a temporary aberration. Moreover, he found the emergence of decadence in the "smaller" literatures as something dangerous and harmful:

> ...В великих європейських літературах декадентська література - це неначе розкіш, письменницькі збитки багатющих літератур, оригінальні й чудернацькі... У Франції деяка публіка забавляється цими новинками, як збитками багатої літератури або як казками й утопіями. Але в менших та в малих літературах ця декадентщина робить велику шкоду.[29]

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[28] Іван Нечуй-Левицький, "Українська декаденщина," *Зібрання творів у десяти томах* т.10 (Київ: Наукова думка, 1955) 188.

[29] Нечуй-Левицький, 222.

Nechui-Levyts'kyi's comments reveal a cautious, even hostile, attitude toward the new trend. In his opinion, French literature could afford decadent experiments and playfulness, whereas Ukrainian literature and, by extension, Ukrainian society needed to pursue a more serious agenda. Formal experimentation, literary games, the forsaking of tradition -- were all associations invoked by the word "decadent." Seen from this perspective, "decadence" was an untenable notion for a developing society on the defense.

Serhii Iefremov's views can be placed on the same continuum with those of Nechui-Levyts'kyi. He saw the new literary movement as a betrayal of Ukrainian literary traditions. He accused the new generation of writers of copying foreign styles which, in his opinion, were injurious to the development of Ukrainian letters. Referring to "decadence" as a construct of the intelligentsia, he condemned the Modernists for following literary fashion instead of being sensitive to Ukrainian social and political realities. Iefremov believed that decadence -- with its themes of decline, unrealistic dreams, and its disdain for simple folk -- was removed from life. In his opinion, decadence would lead to a degeneration of society and the eventual demise of Ukrainian literature:

> ...ради рискованных порывов в туманную высь, закрывающее глаза на такие явления нашей жизни, при одном воспоминании о которых кровь буквально

> стынет в жилах; если оно проповедует презрение к живому человеку ради любви к мертвой природе если ради блаженства нескольких сверхчеловеков оно готово принести в жертву интересы масс народныхь; если, наконец, оно возводит в перл создания отвратительнейшие проявления извращенной человеческой природы, – то мы к нему иначе не можем относиться, как к явлению глубоко отрицательному, признаку упадка и национального маразма, грозящего литературе нашей неисчислимыми потерями и вредом.[30]

Ivan Franko's views on decadence were not as simplistic. On the one hand, he condemned the dark and pessimistic aspects of decadence, and saw no basis for it in Ukraine, because, as he argued, the country and nation were not coming to an end but, rather, were only beginning. On the other hand, however, he accepted what one may call the "symbolist" features of decadence, e.g., aestheticism and idealism. Franko perceived "decadence" as a temporary phenomenon that resulted from the recent French defeat at the hands of the Prussians, an event which unleashed the depression and pessimism reflected in French belles-letters. Franko's opinions helps underscore that Ukrainians conceptualized decadence in social and political, rather than formal, or more broadly, artistic terms. Explaining the political

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[30] Сергій Єфремов, *Літературно-критичні статті* (Київ: Дніпро, 1993) 120.

stimuli that generated decadence in France, Franko sincerely believed that the trend must be terminated and forgotten as soon as possible:

> Батьківщиною декадентства цієї літератури 'fin de siecle' є Франція, вірніше той "величезний резервуар затхлого повітря" - Париж; гніздом же, в якім вилупилось декаденство, є Третя республіка, епоха урядів Тьєра, Мак-Магона і Греві, всемогутнього впливу Гамбетти, тріумфів Буланже. Представником цього напряму є молоде покоління літераторів, яке виросло після великої катастрофи 1871 року, - і це пояснює нам його обличчя і характер... Як напрям це явище тимчасове, воно мусить загинути і бути забутим і чим швидше, тим краще.[31]

Franko rejected decadence outright when aligning its meaning with the notion of society's decay. Nevertheless, when he expanded the idiom's significance to include elements such as aestheticism, emotionalism and idealism, Franko's attitude was more ambivalent. In the article "Internationalism and Nationalism in Modern Literature," for example, he maintained that -- as long as the flower of decadence contained a "healthy seed" (*zdorove zerno*) -- its petals were not entirely evil. Still, in the same article, Franko repeatedly condemns French decadent writers for their mysticism, egotism and immorality. He points especially at the individualism of Verlaine, whom he describes as an egotistical alcoholic:

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[31] Іван Франко, "З галузі науки і літератури," *Твори в двадцяти томах*, т.18 (Київ: Державне видавництво літератури, 1955) 194, 199.

> Поль Верлен, чоловік може і геніальний, та відмолоду затроєний алкоголізмом, поява хоч і характерна, та властиво наскрізь патологічна.[32]

For Franko, decadent writings, such as Mallarme's, was useless because it did not contain any meaningful thought and appeared to be nothing but "babbling":

> Малларме не вкладує в свої слова ніякої думки; в них тільки покревні йому душі можуть відчувати ті самі таємні вібрації чуття, які були у автора при писанні віршів; для загалу вони попросту ляпанина без ніякого значення.[33]

Despite the above, in an essay on aesthetics -- "Iz sekretiv poetychnoi tvorchsti" (From the Secrets of Poetic Creativity, 1898) -- Franko was also able to plead for a literary criticism devoid of political, social, or religious argumentation because these, in his opinion, did not belong in literary criticism. For him, literary criticism had to be primarily built on aesthetic premises. And, inasmuch as he considered aesthetics the realm of psychology, literary criticism had to employ its scholarly methods:

> Літературна критика мусить бути, по нашій думці, поперед усього естетична, значить, входить в обсяг психології і мусить послугуватися тими методами

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[32] Іван Франко, "Інтернаціоналізм і націоналізм," *Твори в двадцяти томах* т.18 (Київ: Державне видавництво літератури, 1955) 507.

[33] Іван Франко, "Стефан Малларме," *Твори в двадцяти томах* т.18 (Київ: Державне видавництво літератури, 1955) 513.

> наукового досліду, якими послугується сучасна психологія.[34]

Franko disagreed with much of French, German and Russian criticism on Naturalism, and argued for the recognition of the role of the subconscious in literature -- in particular, dreams and hallucinations because they perform a specific function in literature:

> В 1884 р. Леметр, розробляючи повість Золя "L'Oeuvre," висказав знехотя дуже цікаву думку: повісті сього майстра "натуралізму" роблять на нього враження кошмару, сонного привиду ... Порівняння поетичної фантазії з сонними привидами, а в дальшій лінії - з галюцинаціями, тобто з привидами на яві, не є пуста забавка.[35]

Franko's interest in the exploration of human psychology reflects a positive attitude to at least this aspect of "decadent" (modern) art. When comparing the old and new in Ukrainian literature, Franko, demonstrated much sophistication. He evaluated as positive the formal, stylistic and thematic innovations brought into Ukrainian literature by European decadent (and, more broadly, modernist) writings. Specifically, Franko welcomed the modernists' exploration of human psychology, their ability to convey different

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[34] Іван Франко, "Із секретів," 53.

[35] Франко, 71.

moods, their attempts to approximate literature to music, and their attention to form and unconventional structures:

> В останніх роках минулого десятиліття на нашім літературнім горизонті появилася ґрупа молодих письменників вихованих на взірцях найновішої европейської літератури, тої що сприкривши собі широкі малюнки зверхнього окруження, головну вагу творчости поклала на психологію, головною метою твору штуки зробила: розбудження в душі читача певного настрою способами, які подають новочасні студії псіхології і так званої псіхофізики ... Нова беллєтристика – се незвичайно тонка філіґранова робота; її змагання – наблизитися скільки можна до музики. Задля сего вона незвичайно дбає о форму, о мельодійність слова, о ритмічність бесіди. Вона ненавидить усяку шабльоновість, ненавидить абстракти, довгі періоди і зложені речення. Натомісь вона любуєся в смілих і незвичайних порівняннях, в уриваних реченях, у півслівцях і тонких натяках.[36]

When praising the new writers' interest in psychology, he particularly admired their lyricism and inclination toward rhythm and musicality as the primordial manifestation of human emotions:

> ... молоді вносять у літературу зовсім інший спосіб трактування речі. У них інша вихідна точка, інша мета, інша техніка ... Для них головна річ людська душа, її стан, її рухи ... усі ті світла й тіні ... вони засідають у душі своїх героїв і нею, мов магічною лампою, освічують усе окруження ... Відси брак довгих описів та трактатів у їх творах і та переможна хвиля ліризму ... відси їх несвідомий наклін до ритмічності й музикальності як

[36] Іван Франко, "З останніх десятиліть XIX в.," *Молода Україна* (Вінніпег: Руська книгарня, 1920) 61.

елементарних об'явів зворушень душі ... Се найвищий тріумф поетичної техніки.[37]

Notwithstanding his positive disposition toward elements that were succinct expressions of "decadence," Franko's attitude toward the word itself was an extremely negative. In his poem "Dekadent," which he addressed to Vasyl' Shchurat,[38] Franko rejects as entirely shameful and unacceptable the characterization of "decadent" which the critic had applied to him.[39] In the poem, Franko explains that the themes of grief, struggle, pain, depression and isolation, which had appeared in his poetry, had nothing to do with physical illness or spiritual despondency. These themes, Franko emphasizes, did not

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[37] Іван Франко, "Старе й нове в сучасній українській літературі," *Зібрання творів у п'ятдесяти томах* т.35 (Київ: Наукова Думка, 1986) 108.

[38] Vasyl' Shchurat had called Franko a "decadent" for his collection of love poetry *Ziv'iale Lystia*. A West Ukrainian literary scholar, community leader, writer, and translator, Shchurat entered literary and public life as Franko's protege under whose influence he remained until 1896. Shchurat graduated from Lviv University in 1895 and received a PhD in "Slavic philosophy" from the University of Vienna in 1896. He initiated the idea of establishing an underground Ukrainian University in Lviv, and served as its first rector between 1921-1923. In 1928, he became president of the Society of Writers and Journalists in Galicia. In 1939 he was elected member of ANU (Ukraine's Academy of Science) and served as the director of the ANU Lviv Scientific Library (1939-1941, 1944-1948). He was also a professor at Lviv University. See, *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* Danylo Husar Struk ed. vol. 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

Shchurat censured decadent ideas and referred to decadents as sick people who unnecessarily express their emotions on paper and resort to meaningless and useless psychological thoughts: "... більша часть декадентів - се люди хорі: їх чувства скріплені односторонно, а їх твори можуть по більшій части служити характеристикою хоровитих настроїв...". See, Василь Щурат, "Французький декадентизм у Польській і Великоруській літературі," *Зоря* 9 (1896): 180.

[39] For Franko "decadent" was a "dark" word ("слово темне").

obliterate his own sense of hope and joy, and will to live. Rather, he explains, they were motivated by the bitter realities of life:

Що в моїй пісні біль, і жаль, і туга –
Се лиш тому, що склалось так життя.
Та є в ній, брате мій, ще нута друга:
Надія, воля, радісне чуття.

Я не люблю безпредметно тужити
Ні шуму в власних слухати вухах;
Поки живий, я хочу справді жити,
А боротьби життя мені не страх.

Хоч часто я гірке й квасне ковтаю,
Не раз і прів, і мерз я, і охрип,
Та ще ж оскомини хронічної не маю,
Катар кишок до мене не прилип.

Franko rejects the charge of 'decadent' and -- alluding to his view of Ukraine as a beginning, rather than declining entity -- stresses that he, a son of his people, a "muzhyk," is a "prologue," not an "epilogue":

Який я декадент? Я син народа,
Що вгору йде, хоч був запертий в льох.
Мій поклик: праця, щастя і свобода,
Я є мужик, пролог, не епілог.

Franko equates "decadence" with a life filled with wanton excess and passivity in the face of life's trials:

Я з п'ющими за пліт не виливаю,
З їдцями їм, для бійки маю бук,
На празднику життя не позіваю,
Та в бідності не опускаю рук.

Ultimately, for Franko, a decadent is nothing but a "parasite":

Не паразит я, що дуріє з жиру,
Що в будні тільки й дума про процент,
А для пісень на "шрррум" настроїть ліру.
Який же я у біса декадент?

In light of such strong rejection of "decadence," it is interesting to note what Ahatanhel Kryms'kyi (1871-1942) said on this account. His preface to the cycle "Pal'move hillia" (Palm's Branches, 1989-1901) is a rare instance when a writer openly embraced the decadent sensibility. He explains that his poetry is for a select readership of "weak" and "emotional" human beings, because only they can relate to his work:

> ...Пускаю в світ отсю книжку не для людей фізично здорових, а тільки для людей трохи слабих, із надламаною життєвою снагою або нервами, - для тих людей, що вміють і легко плакати, і солодко нудьгувати, і молитися богові, і умилятись. Книжка моя - для тих недужих і самітніх людей, що прихильну до них людину або сім'ю можуть з наївним егоїзмом полюбити не менше ніж цілу людськість. Тільки такі читачі (а їх єсть дуже багацько) знайдуть у цій книжці рідні для себе ноти.[40]

Lesia Ukrainka (i.e., Larysa Kosach, 1871-1913) voiced her view of decadence in a letter to her mother Olena Pchilka in 1903, arguing that it was a distinct literary phenomenon not to be confused with symbolism.

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[40] See, Агатангел Кримський, "Заспів," *Поезії* (Київ: Радянський письменник, 1968) 50-51.

Nevertheless, she saw the two, as linked. Quoting Iefremov Ukrainka states: "'Символизм или декаденство' не можна казати, бо то не все одно," ("One cannot say 'Symbolism or Decadence' because they are not the same"). Then, without further explanations, she names the writers who, in her opinion, represented the differences between symbolism and decadence. In the symbolist camp she included Ibsen and Bjornstjerne Bjornson,[41] while designating Maupassant and Chekhov as decadents, because of their "mood" and "philosophy."

> Ібсен і Б'єрнстьєрн, напр., символісти, але не декаденти, а напр., Мопассан і Чехов по настрою і філософії декаденти, але не символісти.[42]

One can speculate that, for Ukrainka, Ibsen (1828-1906) was a symbolist because his works betrayed technical mastery, penetrating psychological

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[41] This name is problematic. It is not clear to whom Lesia Ukrainka may be referring and why the writer would be perceived as a symbolist. If the reference is to Bjornstjerne Bjornson, then it is difficult to understand why Lesia Ukrainka would refer to him only by the first name. Moreover, in Norwegian literature, Bjornson is known as a realist. It is possible, however, that because his prose drama *Leonarda* (1879) was seen to resemble aspects of Ibsen's more recent *A Doll's* House, Ukrainka mentioned him together with Ibsen. See, Edmund Gosse, "Introduction," in Bjornstjerne Bjornson, *The Heritage of the Kurts* (London: William Heinemann, 1892) XII.

It is also possible that Ukrainka's transliteration of the first name is incorrect and that she had in mind Berstand (1807-1814), a French poet who was a highly significant figure in the development of the French prose poem. His works were known for their innovative form and treatment of quintessentially Romantic themes, their hightened sensibility and the opposition of the sentimental and the grotesque. He is also believed to have influenced Baudelaire, Mallarme, Rimbaud, and Apollinare. See, *Larousse Dictionary of Writers* Rosemary Goring ed. (New York: Larousse, 1994) 90.

[42] Леся Українка, "Лист до матері," 21.01.1903 *Про літературу* (Київ: Державне видавництво художньої літератури, 1955) 233.

insight and used symbols. Her view of Maupassant (1850-1893) as a decadent may stem from his works that describe madness and fear with horrifying accuracy, while eschewing sentimentality and idealism. I suspect that Ukrainka placed Chekhov (1860-1904) among the decadents also because of the pessimism of his heroes -- sensitive individuals imbued with hopelessness.

The views of Ukrainian authors demonstrate the paradoxical typology of the meaning and application of the critical idiom "decadent." The traditionalistic criticism of Nechui-Levyts'kyi and Iefremov reveals their negative attitude toward everything modern, which they automatically dismissed as "decadent." Seeing literature as a purely socio-political institution, they did not see the need for the development of decadence in Ukraine and, moreover, feared its negative influence. For them decadence was alien to Ukrainian society; if allowed to flourish, this "elitist" construct would destroy Ukrainian literary tradition. By condemning modernity's darker, negative and pessimistic aspects, they dismissed decadence, as well as the experimental and idealistic tenets associated with symbolism. Franko, a subtler critic, saw literature as an autonomous entity. Although he rejected

those negative aspects of "decadence," which he surmised to be the reflection of a country's decline, he admired the thematic, formal and stylistic innovations of modernist writers.

In conclusion, pronouncements of Ukrainian turn-of-the-century critics and writers reveal that they shared, to a greater or lesser degree, the opinion that the terms "decadent" and "decadence" not only connoted, but denoted decay, something they unanimously condemned. Nonetheless, a minority (Franko and Kryms'kyi, e.g.) lauded the idealistic, psychological, subjective, and experimental qualities that the practice of decadent writing implied.

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF HNAT KHOTKEVYCH'S WORKS BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Among the turn-of-the-century writers who were harshly criticized for decadent tendencies (Ol'ha Kobylians'ka, Natalia Kobryns'ka, Mykhailo Iats'kiv, Katria Hrynevycheva), Hnat Khotkevych was one of the most

prominent. His collection of short stories, *Poeziia v prozi*, was the object of specially harsh criticism by both Iefremov and Nechui-Levyts'kyi.

The only critic who saw in Khotkevych an emerging talent was Ivan Franko. Although he emphasized Khotkevych's potential, Franko, nevertheless, noted that the preponderance of lyricism and subjectivism in his works prevented Khotkevych from executing the necessary formal finishing touches:

> Його оповідання з артистичного погляду стоять невисоко; перевага суб'єктивного ліричного елементу не дає йому пластично викінчувати картин; та проте декуди він піднімається на висоту справжнього таланту, що велить надіятись гарного розвою.[43]

Iefremov and Nechui-Levyts'kyi were much less generous and dubbed Khotkevych with the derogatory title "decadent." In the article "V poiskakh novoi krasoty" (1902), Iefremov attacked *Poeziia v prozi*, because he saw in it such negative traits as the preoccupation with abstract beauty, the communion with spirits, an obsession with love, and a disdain for mankind:

> Итак, доходящее до фетишизма преклонение пред красотой, даже идеей, абстракцией красоты, общение с бесплотными духами, упоение любовью и презрение к человеку, его жизни и делам – вот чему научились мы из произведений г. Хоткевича.[44]

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[43] Франко, "З останніх," 50.

[44] Єфремов, 70-71.

Printed in green, *Poeziia v prozi* not merely explored decadent themes, but was also visually 'repulsive' to some readers. This visual strategy was just one of the ways in which Khotkevych broke with tradition. Noting the similarity between this edition and painted botanical publications, Nechui-Levyts'kyi, in the article "Ukrains'ka decadentshchyna" (Ukrainian Decadence), concurred with Iefremov's analysis, aligning Khotkevych with those "decadent" writers who explore erotic themes:

> До декадентів належиться і д. Гнат Хоткевич (Галайда) в своїх останніх новіших утворах ... 1902 року він видав кільки оповіданнів в опрічній чималій книжці, котра надрукована не чорним чорнилом, а зеленим з зеленими малюнками в заголовках, що робить її схожою на фарбовані ботанічні видання. В цій книжці сливе усі оповідання написані вже в іншому тоні, в декадентському ... Д. Хоткевича ми залічуємо до декадентів естетів та еротистів.[45]

These early assessments of Khotkevych were reiterated in later Soviet criticism. *Poeziia v prozi* was rarely mentioned by Soviet critics; but when it was, the collection was deemed to be the victim of "bourgeois decadence," a weed that, ostensibly, had suffocated many literatures and also took root on Ukrainian soil:

> ...шукаючи нових художніх засобів для відображення явищ життя, Г. Хоткевич у деяких прозових творах (збірка "Поезія в прозі") ... почав заглиблюватися в

[45] Нечуй-Левицький, 202.

> душевні переживання психічно неврівноважених натур ... відображати хворобливі марення жерців "чистого мистецтва," які над усе цінять "вічну" і "незмінну" красу. Письменник явно зробив крок у бік буржуазного декадансу, що на початку XX століття висушував живі соки багатьох літератур і вже почав пускати коріння і в українській літературі.[46]

Soviet critics rejected aestheticism, idealism, emotionalism, pessimism, and the concept of "art for art's sake" associated with decadence.[47] In their opinion, all of these tenets negatively influenced Khotkevych's development as a writer.

REJECTING THE CHARGE OF "DECADENCE"

Inasmuch as Ukrainian critics tended to associate "decadence" with the exploration of mystical fantasies and pornography, the world of subjective

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[46] Федір Погребенник, "Гнат Хоткевич," передмова. В кн. Гнат Хоткевич, *Твори в двох томах* т.1 (Київ: Дніпро, 1966) 7–8.

[47] Their views are in keeping with Marxist criticism, which saw decadence as a natural phenomenon, the inevitable form of a dying culture in a dying society. It was understood as the result of a free and consciously reactionary choice by writers and artists. As Plekhanov pointed out: "Constitutionally incapable of serious work, the decadents are filled with most sincere indignation at the thought of a social order in which there will be no idlers. The slothful decadent is also greedy and in total collusion with the bourgeoisie, which he pretends to despise: 'Art for art's sake... has become art for money's sake...'" See, Matei Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977) 201.

feelings, and the cult of the "new beauty," it is not surprising that the charge of decadence was denied by all Ukrainian writers. Among those who were greatly affected by the criticism were Hnat Khotkevych and Ol'ha Kobylians'ka. On the basis of their personal correspondence and unpublished articles, I will demonstrate that they vehemently refused the designation imposed on them, and repeatedly tried to free themselves from it.

Commenting on Iefremov's statements, Ol'ha Kobylians'ka defines herself as a symbolist. In a letter to O. Makovei, she expresses repulsion for decadence, a term that summoned in her mind clearly negative associations: "А щодо мене, то я ніколи декаденткою не була і не буду, бо мені всякий декадентизм противний."[48] Kobylians'ka states that she was not inspired by the Przybyszewskis and Huysmans, and all others who have been carried away by "unconsciousness." Rather, she sees herself as being animated by the "calm" author, G. Keller (1819-1890):

> Я не одушевлялась ніякими Пшебишевськими і Гуїсманами - і всіми тими, іншими в обморок попавшими ... моє одушевлення для такого спокійного автора, як Gottfried Keller.[49]

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[48] Ольга Кобилянська, "Лист до О. Маковея," 15 грудня 1902, *Твори в п'яти Томах* т.5 (Київ: Державне видавництво художньої літератури, 1963) 520.

[49] Кобилянська, "Лист," 15 грудня 1902, 520.

It appears from this that, for Kobylians'ka decadence connoted some type of imbalance, a sickly swooning. Her allusion to the Polish poet and novelist S. Przybyszewski (1868-1927) and the French novelist J. Huysmans (1848-1907), suggests that she did not approve of the "naturalism" of the former, nor the mysticism and aestheticism of the latter. Her preference for the Swiss poet and short story writer Keller suggests that she would rather be identified with his symbolism, psychology and sense of humour.

Khotkevych wrote articles in his own defense but was refused publication, in particular by *Kievskaia Starina,*[50] the journal where some of the original attacks had appeared. When stating his case, Khotkevych never addressed those specific thematic and stylistic features of his work, which had been assessed as decadent. Paradoxically -- like Nechui-Levyts'kyi, Iefremov and Franko -- Khotkevych argued that decadence was a social phenomenon that had no place within a newly energized Ukrainian society and hence inapplicable to him, a writer:"Як можна добачати декаденс в українській суспільності, що ще тільки-тільки почала

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[50] In a letter to the editorial board of *Literaturno-Naukovyi Vistnyk* (1903) Khotkevych outlines the difficulty in publishing a reply to critics. Russian journals, he explains, were not interested in questions of Ukrainian literature. Readers of Western Ukrainian journals were not exposed to the discussion that took place in *Kievskaia Starina* and, therefore, were not interested in publishing any polemical discussion on the issue raised in this journal. He complains that although the new writers were openly criticized, they were not given the opportunity to reply.

народжуватися..."[51] In his opinion, decadence could exist only in France or Russia where it had an opportunity to overturn well-established traditions. In Ukrainian society, with its mostly peasant population, this task could not be accomplished by the few "conscious Ukrainians" working the cultural field:

> ....але ні в якім разі то [декаденство] не могло відноситися до суспільності української з її безконечним морем селянства і парою-другою, як тоді називалося, "свідомих українців," що падали під вагою всякої праці на народній ниві.[52]

Kobylians'ka's and Khotkevych's inability to free themselves from the stigma of "decadence" strongly affected their literary careers. As Khotkevych confesses, the constant attacks of critics led to a loss of confidence in himself as a writer and drove him to isolation. This, in turn, resulted in fewer publications:

> Це був перший удар по моїй літературній фізіономії. Я почув себе самітнім. Припинив свою роботу в ЛНВ, хоч до того часу не було числа, де б що-небудь хоч кілька рядків, я не видрукував. На великій Україні, окрім "К[иївської] Старини", друкуватися було ніде, - і от з того часу я почав, при божім благословенню, складати свої рукописи в довгий ящик ... І мені здавалося довший час, що моя письменницька кар'єра склалася б цілком інакше, не будь отого удару.[53]

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[51] Гнат Хоткевич, "Передмова автора," *Твори* т.4 (Харків: Рух, 1929) 5-6.
[52] Хоткевич, 5-6.
[53] Хоткевич, 22.

Kobylians'ka's confidence was also broken. She wrote: "В душі в мене все сидить недовір'я до своїх праць!"[54]

Kobylians'ka's and Khotkevych's defensive attitudes clearly reveal that for them, the designation "decadent" was inadequate and unacceptable as a characterization of their writings. Khotkevych, much like the critics who attacked him, understood decadence as a phenomenon that had no fertile ground in Ukrainian society. Kobylians'ka accepted only the so-called "symbolist" elements of decadence such as individualism, subjectivism and emotionalism. Their defensive arguments notwithstanding, the oeuvre of both Kobylians'ka and Khotkevych did manifest decadent features. For them, however, these features were a reflection of modernity and not decay.

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[54] Кобилянська, "Лист," 15 грудня 1902, 522.

CHAPTER 3

POEZIIA V PROZI

The goal of this chapter is to identify the decadent features, both thematic and formal, of Hnat Khotkevych's early works. For purposes of this thesis, I will limit my analysis to the collection *Poeziia v prozi* (1902), which elicited such harsh criticism from Iefremov and Nechui-Levyts'kyi.

Poeziia v prozi consists of seven short stories, written between 1899 and 1901, which appeared in the collection in the following order: "Portret" (Portrait, 1900); "Poeziia v prozi" (Prose Poetry [year unknown]); "Bila bereza" (White Birchtree, 1898); "Berceuse Chopen'[a]" (Chopin's Berceuse 1901); "Osin'" (Autumn, 1901); "Romans" (Romance, 1901); and "Spokii dukha i dukh spokoiu" (Peace of Spirit and The Spirit of Peace, 1899).

When considering the decadent traits of these works, I will weigh both the Ukrainian understanding of "decadence" (eroticism, pornography, etc.) and the more general definitions and attributes of the term provided in Western histories and theories of art. For purposes of this investigation, I will highlight the following features: (a) the exploration of human psychology,

especially, feelings of emptiness, pain, and obsession; (b) the idealization of beauty and the interrelation between beauty and ugliness; (c) the reflection of life in dreams and fantasy; (d) the fascination with the past and preoccupation with the future; (e) the transformation of nature and creation of an artificial environment; and (f) the formal characteristics that manifest novelty of form and style.

THE STORIES: A SHORT SUMMARY

To facilitate further discussion, I will begin by briefly summarizing the stories of *Poeziia v prozi* presenting them in the chronological order in which they were written.

"Poeziia v prozi," subtitled "V al'bom O.K." (For the album of O. K. [Ol'ha Kobylians'ka]), is the only work whose date of writing is not identified in the collection. It is safe to assume that, like all others, it was written in the early 1900's. Only one page long, this composition is a true prose poem.[55] Its

[55] 'Prose poem' refered to a composition printed as prose but distinguished by elements common in poetry. These elements include elaborately contrived rhythms, figures of speech, rhyme, internal rhyme, and startling images. Among the writers who have attempted the 'prose poem' were: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Oscar Wilde. See, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* Cuddon J. A. Ed. (London: The Penguin, 1991) 750-751.

internal rhymes, incomplete sentences and refrains combine to create a lyrical and melancholy atmosphere.

Divided into four short paragraphs, which are visually separated by two rows of dotted lines, the poem is essentially plotless. In the first two paragraphs, the text moves from the portrayal of a moonlit night sky to a description of the earth with birds singing in an orchard, to a watery setting and personified willow trees. The third and the fourth paragraphs contrast with the first two paragraphs because they introduce the presence of humans. The third paragraph depicts joyous young men engaging in social contact; the fourth, in contrast, discloses the loneliness and emotional pain of a persona secluded in a house. Although the poem is written in the third person, its tone is quite subjective, lyrical and emotional. The use of such key lexical words as "сльози," "ридання," "смуток," "таємний," "тихий," and "журба" creates a melancholy mood.

"Bila bereza," written in 1898, is one of Khotkevych's earliest works. The brief narrative, five pages in length, allegorically outlines a man's entire life. The emotionalism of the third-person narrative, several dialogues and

monologues create a very subjective atmosphere. The tone of the story is pessimistic throughout. The opening scene recalls Romantic themes -- specifically, Shevchenko's poem "Kateryna." It tells the tragic story of a mother who drowns herself in despair, thus abandoning her only child, Mykola -- the story's protagonist. The suicide is witnessed by a personified birch tree that functions as Mykola's soul mate. The empathy between nature and man is very strong. The story draws a parallel between the "whiteness" of the birch tree (reflecting "innocence" and "holiness") and the human soul. From childhood to adulthood, one sees the protagonist communicating all his deepest thoughts and sorrows to this tree. The young man is portrayed as a strong and hard working individual who undergoes a significant change when he falls in love. Preoccupied by the image of his beloved girl, Mykola wonders around in disillusionment. His emotional pain brings him to the birch. He calls on the birch tree, with its supernatural powers, to grant him the girl in exchange for his soul. Although his request is granted, Mykola's happiness is short-lived. The vagueness and uncertainty of the plot does not make it clear what exactly happens, but the reader realizes that Mykola is eventually left alone to live in pain. In revenge for his agony, he destroys the birch which he holds responsible for his unhappiness. After this incident, a

hidden sense of emptiness overcomes Mykola. Disillusioned, he moves to the city. To fill his emotional void, he devotes himself exclusively to work. For his political commitment, he is sent "far away" to Siberia. At the end of his life, he is seen alone. His only companion is a little birch tree under which he wishes to be buried. The reappearance of the birch at the end of the story reinforces the idea of the eternal bond between man and nature, and also symbolizes the revival of the protagonist's soul.

"Spokii dukha i dukh spokoiu" (1899) is the story of a man's dream. Narrated in the third person, it explores the spiritual struggle of man. The mood of this work changes from pessimism and anxiety to optimism. Philosophical and allegorical, this brief work is a meditation on the spiritual world, rather than the physical and social. In a dream state -- a theme typical of decadent writings -- the human spirit searches for peace and for an answer to the question: "What does everything external mean?" First, the spirit flies to the stars but finds only lifeless space. It returns to earth and asks a hermit: "Is there peace where he abides?" The hermit responds that one can find

peace only when one overcomes pride. The hermit's advice that peace is attainable when one equates oneself with one's "soul and body," with the "humblest people in the world," is visually highlighted in the text. The spirit takes this advice and goes to live among the "dark," "mad," and "perverse" people. Amidst these people the soul finds peace when it no longer tries to elevate itself above them. Thus, allegorically, the story emphasizes that human beings can be at peace with themselves not in isolation but only when they are a functional part of human society.[56]

"Portret," subtitled "Fantaziia" (A Fantasy, 1900) is a third person narrative. Pessimistic in tone, the story consists of three chapters, making it one of the longest works in the collection. It has a well-structured plot, and is distinguished by its long and detailed description of scenes and characters.

Two people, a woman and the main protagonist, a student by the name of Lorio, are walking, reminiscing about their past. They come across a portrait of a girl in a bakery shop; the woman identifies the girl in the portrait as Ida. Lorio becomes instantly overpowered by the beauty of the portrayed girl, especially, her eyes -- her "internal world" -- which seem to penetrate through all "darkness and falsehood." Lorio's companion, in a long first

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[56] This story is very much in the Ukrainian tradition, as this same theme reappears later in Kotsiubyns'kyi's *Intermezzo*.

person digressive narrative, reveals to him Ida's tragic life story. Ida, it turns out, was persecuted and destroyed by a society that could not appreciate and understand her beauty. Women disliked her because she attracted the attention of every man; men, on the other hand, sexually abused her. Ida's father did not permit her to leave home to become an actress, i.e. fulfill herself in art. Rejected by society and her own family, Ida found escape from her pain and suffering in death. The story suggests that Beauty such as this cannot survive in human society because jealousy and sex violate all that which is beautiful.

The story about Ida shocks Lorio and he becomes obsessed with the girl's image and her tragedy. He, as a social human being, feels partly responsible for her death. Lorio purchases Ida's portrait, eager to be in her constant presence. He withdraws from the outside world which, in his mind, was responsible for the destruction of his ideal. Ida becomes his obsession. Seeing in her eyes only sadness and death, he finds the original painter of the portrait and has him repaint her eyes. As a defender of Ida's principles, one who highly values her "divine" beauty, Lorio is determined to give Ida peace, love and attention. In his apartment, he creates for her a shrine, surrounding the portrait with flowers. To break free of his obsession, Lorio decides to give

the portrait to Ida's family. He meets Ida's father who, after the death of his daughter, also became obsessed with her image. The father reserved a room for Ida, where he placed many of her portraits. At night, in a state of madness, he takes Lorio to the cemetery and together they dig up her grave. All they find there are Ida's decayed remains. The shocked father dies at the grave site and Ida's body is reburied the next day without anyone noticing that two joints of Ida's fingers are missing. The story ends at this point, leaving the reader to speculate that Lorio escaped from the scene with a relic, a fragment of his ideal.

"Chopin's Berceuse" (1901), subtitled "Etiud" (Etude) and dedicated "To all young mothers" (Vsim molodym materiam) is a polemical work that proposes a new model of existence by presenting a struggle between two ways of life -- the passive versus the active, the positivist versus the modernist. The story is presented through the point of view of a mother who teaches her son the ethic and value of life. This is a lengthy text incorporating a number of voices: it begins with a third-person narrator who maintains an

objective point of view; then the narrative gradually switches to first-person monologue, which is graphically set apart; and, finally, there appears the mother's voice speaking in the third person. The story is built on contrasts. Its first paragraph presents the natural and ideal union of two sincere people who -- despite their poverty -- are united in love and harmony. Their union is constrasted with the artificiality of wedding ceremonies among wealthy families. Emphasizing the passing of time -- a decadent theme -- the scene changes to show the former bride as a mother with her first-born son. Because she, the main protagonist, is not given a name but is described as an "angel" on a divine mission, her image evokes associations with that of a "Madonna with child." In her monologue, she prays to God for her son's inner peace and for harmony in his household. Wishing her child freedom and wisdom, the mother is ready to become a servant of hidden powers. She wants her son to be a sensitive and kind individual who is free of material needs and all kinds of bondage. Seeking a way to protect him from life's traps, she assumes the role of prophet and teacher, and defines for him what is good and bad in life. To convey her teachings in an indelible manner, the mother transforms her thoughts and feelings into music. As she plays the piano, the movements of the left and the right hand reveal a series of

metaphors and images imbued with symbolic value. The left hand -- with its monotonous rhythm, "lifeless" and "immobile" images -- represents the uniformity, passivity and conventionality of average members of society. All this symbolically suggests the principles of positivism. In contrast, the movements of the right hand create natural and exotic images that evoke the emotionalism associated with struggles and changes of an active life -- in short, a modernist ideology. Exposing two types of human existence through the power of music, the mother hopes that her son will develop into an active and sensitive man. Above all, she wants him to strive at being unique, to rise above mediocrity. At the end of the story the lyrical narrator of the first passage reenters the text, and assures the mother that her music, will convey life's message and affect the child's soul and his individuality.

"Osin'"[57] (1901), subtitled "Rozdil z romana, shcho ne isnuie" (An Excerpt From a Novel That Does Not Exist),[58] deals with the passing of time

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[57] The title "Osin'" (Autumn) -- season, associated with decline and an end, reflecting decadence is very much in the modernist tradition.

[58] In the article "V poiskakh novoi krasoty" Iefremov suggested that "Osin'" is a continuation of the story "Berceuse Chopen'a." See, Єфремов, 64.

and the function of memory. Pessimistic in tone, the story depicts one night in the life of a lonely man who -- in his old age -- reflects on his life. His recollections engage personal photographs that capture four occasions from his past involving the woman, Katrusia. The first photograph, taken in spring, depicts the beginning of their happiness and love together. This image is reinforced by the seasonal context of the photograph. The second photograph, taken in summer, evokes the joy of his life with Katrusia. The next photograph, taken in the fall, summons and magnifies feelings of sadness. Autumn reminds him of his loneliness and imminent end. The last photo, taken in winter, makes him reflect on the unknown future. This future has already turned into the sad reality of an old man, living in solitude. While taking pleasure in memories of the past, the protagonist is left puzzled by his present inner feeling of emptiness. The existential ending of the story does not offer a solution to his pain.

"Romans" (Romance) -- subtitled "Ironia" (Irony, 1901) -- depicts a night in luxuriant and exotic settings. The magical powers of the night affect

the hearts of two young people who are filled with love and desire. Written in the third person, the story is very lyrical. At first we see the beautiful couple somewhere near desert beach with its typical flora, sounds, and smells. Then, we see them amidst ancient amphitheaters and scented rooms. The narrative does not contain any graphic description of sex, but its strong sensual texture, reinforced by descriptions of nature, intimate the physical experiences of the lovers. The story gradually progresses toward a climatic, sensual ending.

DECADENT THEMES

As the summary above might suggest, in *Poeziia v prozi* Khotkevych explores a wide spectrum of themes representative of the decadent sensibility. He is concerned with psychological dimensions, with revealing his protagonists' states of being -- whether this involves pain, tension, inner struggle, obsession or sexual desire. Khotkevych's characters are preoccupied with love, with their past and their future -- all of which are prominent topics in the decadent repertoire.

Perhaps most typically, it is a woman's ideal beauty that triggers an entire complex of emotions. The protagonists who are absorbed by the female form live in a world of dreams and fantasy. To a greater or lesser degree, the stories "Bila bereza," "Portret," and "Romans" are devoted to this topic.

"Bila bereza" shows the protagonist's emotions as he falls in love with a girl. Although Mykola's imagination is affected by the girl's image, the description of her in the story is limited to the following line: "Перед очима стоїть струнка дівоча постать, тихий голос ллється в душу й білі руки простягаються до нього..." (108). Idealization of the girl's beauty is not central to the story but does serve as a pivotal point in the plot. Mykola is so absorbed by the girl he is unable to work. He wanders around in a melancholy state. This inclination, as John Reed points out, is typical of decadent protagonists: their inevitable frustration leads them to a "melancholy obsession with remoteness in space or time."[59] Witness Mykola's behaviour:

> Встане ранком - і не за працю сідає, не перо або книжку бере у руки, а дубець і йде блукати кудись, куди очі дивляться. Із стогоном шепоче серед лану: 'О Галю, Галю!' Душа болить. Перед очима стоїть струнка дівоча постать... А потім наче щезне все те. (108)

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[59] Reed, 16.

Overpowered by unrequited love and unable to bear his pain, Mykola -- in a desperate moment -- turns to supernatural powers and exchanges his soul for the girl's love. When his wish is granted, he experiences overwhelming joy:

> О, щастя людське! Яке ти малесеньке, яке ж коротесеньке! Але яке ж ти повне й сильне!.. Він обіймав її, він цілував її й шепотів ласкаві слова. Він світ міг би побороти в ті хвилини і міг би всім людям дати щастя... Вони побрались. Міцно держаться вони одно з одним за руки, кріпко стоять на життєвому шляху...(109)

But this happiness is short lived. Lacking a soul, Mykola's life becomes meaningless and emotionally stressful. His suffering is intolerable:

> Але... Скінчилося щастя. Відібрав Бог ... його душу, взяв до себе світлий рай, утіху й єдине сонце. Відірвав половину серця і зоставив жити з другою, вічно конати, вічно боліти... (109)

An important decadent technique involves the transformation or personification of nature. This technique is also applied in "Bila bereza," where -- as I have indicated -- the birch tree assumes very human characteristics.[60] At the beginning of the story, the tree acts as the soul mate of the recently abandoned infant Mykola:

> І біла береза ніби нахилилася до дитини, кинула кілька своїх пожовклих зморщених листочків, немов прикрити ними хотіла маленьку істоту...(107)

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[60] M. Kotsiubyns'kyi also explores the theme of transformation of nature in the impressionistic work *Intermezzo*.

The tree is also endowed with supernatural powers; it helps the adult Mykola to realize his wish by winning for him his beloved girl.

> І береза вволила його волю. Дала йому панну... А береза тихо тріпотить гілками над ними, любується і весело шепоче своїм малесеньким листям... (109)

When Mykola cuts the birch tree down, his victim is depicted bleeding, as if it were a human:

> От стукнуло щось... раз... удруге!... Глибоко пішла сокира у м'яке дерево, полилася з рани біла березина кров, а листя, стрепенувшись, кинуло кілька росинок на землю...Упала береза - і щось відірвалось у нього всередині... Пусто стало... І дико дивилися тепер його очі на цей труп, на це маленьке листячко... (110)

Among the decadent features of "Bila bereza," we encounter a prominent Romantic theme, namely the bond between man and nature. To paraphrase Reed, the Romantic hero projects his fecund emotions into the natural world and seeks a union with nature.[61] Mykola's feelings of emptiness after he cuts down the tree, like the tree's empathy for him ever since he was a little child, represent Khotkevych's treatment of this theme.

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[61] Reed, 16.

The idealization of a girl's beauty takes on major dimensions in the story "Portret." Here a detailed description of Ida's features serve to prefigure the effect her portrait will have on Lorio:

> ... Високо зачісане волосся відтіняло розкішшю темної корони все матового кольору обличчя. Горде, рівне чоло, рукою генія виточений із мрамору ніс, підборіддя, маленькі трохи сухі губи, дивно хорошій зворот голови - то було якесь волшебство, то було втілення свавільних до шалу принципів краси...(Portret 84)

The physical characteristics of the girl -- for example, "високо зачісане волосся" (hair done high); "матового кольору обличчя" (dark coloured face); "горде, рівне чоло" (proud, straight forehead); "рукою генія виточений із мрамору ніс, підборіддя..."(the nose and chin are carved in marble by the hand of a genius) -- reveal the nature of the ideal. Moreover, the girl is not merely an ideal beauty but the "embodiment of beauty unrestrained to the point of frenzy" ("втілення свавільних до шалу принципів краси"). Her beauty is identified with "the sole manifestation of that Eternal Beauty," which is found only in nature and in the arts, and which acts as the very axis of the universe:

> Вона ж була красою, єдиним з проявленнь тієї Вічної Краси, якій ми звикли поклонятись з далеких-далеких віків. Вона всюди, та Краса: і в шумах непробудної тайги, і в бризках сріблястих водоспаду, і в безлічі зірок небесних, і в музиці, в поезії...Ми

> ловимо душею за посередністю очей, слуху відгомін тієї Вічної Краси, котра й є альфою й омегою світу. То - вісь, біля якої вертиться вселенна. (90)

However, Ida -- the embodiment of beauty -- cannot survive in a corrupt world governed by abuse and jealousy; she is destroyed by society. Lorio, as a defender of the ideals Ida symbolizes, is tormented by his powerlessness. His emotional distress is revealed through nightmares in which he tries to save her:

> І мені так жаль її... утопленої... так хочеться врятувати її... Я чую вночі, як кричить вона десь унизу... вона не хоче вмирати.... Я чую... Я кричу їй у відповідь...а витягти... витягти - не можу... І я плачу...плачу тоді...прошу прощення...А вона ... вона не хоче простить мені за те що... я теж людина.
> І, тихо схиливши голову на руки, Лоріо беззвучно заплакав... (99)

Lorio is so consumed by the girl's irresistible beauty that he aspires to fuse with the portrait: "Він жив очима в тому портреті; йому хотілось злитись воєдино з тим полотном..."(94). He lives under the illusion that the portrait is a perfect living human being who can overhear harsh voices; therefore, he cautions a friend not to speak: "Тс-с-с... тс-с-с!.. Ти краще нічого не говори... Їй болюче вражає вухо всякий грубий скрик" (97). Treating the image as if it were the icon of a saint, Lorio places it in a special room where he sets up a shrine and surrounds the

portrait with greenery and flowers.[62] This, in my opinion, reflects the feature of "artificiality" which, according to Carter,[63] is the chief characteristic of decadence. Consider the following description of Ida's shrine:

> Кімната уся була укрита килимом; зелені, квітів було без числа, великі рослини були розставлені де тільки можна. Важка стора закривала єдине вікно, напівосвітлюючи всю ту обстановку, а посередині маленької кімнаточки на високому рівному мольберті в задрапованій золотій рамі стояв розкішний великий портрет... Повітря було запашне, повне вогкости від багатьох рослин. (97)

The story also develops the decadent theme of morbid preoccupation with death taken to an extreme. Lorio not only creates Ida's cult in his home but, together with her father, also digs up her grave. There he discovers the girl's decayed corpse staring with its "black holes," and her frightening skull, teeth and bones:

> ...глянули з темряви уверх чорні ями замість очей... Голий череп вискалив зуби і немов сміявся... сміявся ... а місяць дивився згори, заглядав у яму і бачив там перетлілу одіж, кістки рук і страшно - страшно вискалені зі сміхом зуби...(104)

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[62] Compare the envrionment of flowers found in Huysmans' *Against Nature*: "Des Esseintes has always been excessively fond of flowers... his inborn taste for the artificial had led him to neglect the real flower for its copy, faithfully and almost miraculously executed in indiarubber and wire, calico and taffeta, paper and velvet...This admirable artistry had long enthralled him, but now he dreamt of collecting another kind of flora: tired of artificial flowers aping real ones, he wanted some natural flowers that would look like fakes." See, Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature* Robert Baldick trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1973) 96-97.

[63] Carter, 25.

According to Reed, decadence stresses the interrelationship of beauty and ugliness.[64] The juxtaposition of Ida's beauty, which is idealized in her portrait, with the ugliness of her corpse serves precisely such a purpose. As Reed explains, decadence utilizes ugly details to convey a sense of spiritual longing. It is perhaps with this purpose in mind that Khotkevych makes Lorio remove a joint of Ida's finger. Lorio's spiritual longing is motivated by his extreme fascination with his ideal. This type of perverse obsession, as Carter points out, is quite characteristic of decadent writers.[65]

Critics have indicated that decadent artists often recognized the nothingness at the center of existence and dreaded the emptiness within themselves:

> ...[the] decadent *isolato* is usually an artist who finds nothing in the external world intriguing enough to draw him into action and who thus accumulates experiences and sensations within himself, hoping to fill the central void.[66]

In decadent writing, this state of being is often linked to the protagonist's fascination with a remote past. Khotkevych's "Osin'" explored precisely this theme. In this story, the protagonist is isolated from the outside world -- both

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[64] Reed, 14.

[65] Carter, 25.

[66] Reed, 16.

physically (he is depicted alone in his study) and chronologically (he is an old man). He relives his past, searching through memory for the joyous moments of his existence. The story's title, "Osin'" (Autumn), signals from the very beginning a sense of pessimism, of imminent decline. The artificiality of the protagonist's unlit study, which is filled with books, suggests an atmosphere of detachment and solitude:[67]

> Важкі, оточені бахрамою стори були спущені і світло не вривалося свавільно до цієї кімнати...Біля столу з усякими непотрібними дрібницями стояли шафи з книжками, але з чистеньких блискучих задків, що на них золотом було повибивано назвисько книжки, годі було догадатися о головні симпатії володільця. Ці шафи, зашклені, чисті ... (112)

In the story, the memories of the past are embodied in the protagonist's photographs. Looking at each one, he not only recalls moments from the past but also relives them and comments on them. Once he returns to the present, the protagonist is overtaken by the urge to cry, a desire that betrays his pain and emotional emptiness. Ultimately, the state of his heart does not enable him to dissipate his mood:

> І захотілося плакать, малими діточими сльозами... І уткнутися лицем до подушки, але ... сильним рухом

[67] Some parallels can be drawn to a section of *Against Nature*: "One section of the bookshelves lining the walls of Des Esseintes' blue and orange study was filled with nothing but Latin works - works, which minds drilled into conformity by repetitious university lectures, lump together under the generic name of 'the Decadence.'" See, Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature* Robert Baldick trans. (London: Pinguin Books, 1973) 40.

> руки хотів зігнати з себе проклятий настрій, але він не зганяється руками, бо зостається із серцем (120).

The protagonist's memories increase his anguish. He realizes that he is left to live in solitude without any hope for happiness. This creates for him a psychological dilemma because he does not know how to deal with loneliness:

> ...отаке... Весною й осінь здається ба' якою. А от тепер вона прийшла, справжня, і - нема нічого. Ні надій, ні щастя... лише повна і глибока, як провалля, самітність. (120)

The protagonist's psychological state is revealed even more when he enters into a dialogue with his soul. He questions her in order to understand his emotional pain but does not obtain an answer. This reevaluation of the self is yet another manifestation of decadent morbidity:

> Гей ти, невідома мені душе! Я не знав тебе, не знаю і знати не хочу. Я не бачив тебе очима, не держав у руках і чим же ти можеш уразити мене, моє тіло? Не украв я нічого, нікого не вбив. Я жив кожну хвилину як треба було, не говорив собі : 'дурний, отак би!...' Так чому ж у мене пустка тепер у грудях, чому там лише камінь важенний валляється й б'є мене, коли я нахилюсь?.. Ой, чому ж, чому?..Хто дасть відповідь, хто покаже причину? (123)

The decadent hero, being often disenchanted by the present, is lured into the future by "hopelessly elegant dreams."[68] Such a preoccupation with

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[68] Reed, 16.

the future plays a role in "Chopin's Berceuse." In this story, as I have already stated, the mother teaches the child how to develop into a perfect individual. However, the mother's concern with her child's future reveals yet another decadent preoccupation, namely the cultivation of individualism, especially as inspired by Nietzsche:

> Вільну душу я хочу дати тобі! Вільну-вільну, як орел в небесах, як вітер по рівному полі, як хвиля морська! Ти повинен схилятися тільки перед силою власної душі тільки їй, невгамовній, невтомній в шуканні та любові, ти повинен коритись. (32)

The idea that one should bow only before the power of one's own soul ("схилятися тільки перед силою власної душі"), strongly suggests the decadent commitment to the "Nietzschean [...] effort at self-creation out of the chaos of existence."[69]

In the story, music -- a symbolist prominant element -- is used as the primary medium through which the mother's knowledge of life is communicated to her son:

> ...Я стану грати тобі... Я гратиму... Я душу всю віллю в ті звуки, що пронесу над твоєю колискою... Нехай сльози, що капатимуть з моїх очей, нехай... запишуться вони краплями незмивними у твоїй маненькій душі й принесе, принесе тобі геній усього, чого хочу так я...(34)

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[69] Reed, 15.

Music is also used to reflect the mother's emotional state. She expresses her entire being and her wishes for the son in musical sounds:

> В душі якось невиразно смутно стало, звуки ніби не переставали відкілясь набігати, знову зникали, стискували серце - і плакать, плакать хотілось... Влила вона всю душу свою жіночу молоду в ті звуки - моління, напоїла їх власною кров'ю, віддалсь туди вся і прикликала дивні впливи... (43).

As I indicated in my summary, the story "Romans" indirectly describes the erotic experiences of a couple. As subtle as this description appears to me, Khotkevych's exploration of the erotic theme won him the title of "pornographer." Let us review the passage in question:

> ...задзвеніла струна, пристрастним вібрато зманила вона й другий звук за собою і - все заполонилося й залилося в сяйві та в темноті... Щось швидко літало й билося... страждало й молилося, рвучись, а вилетівши під вільні промені місяця, зірками розсипалось по саду всьому. І затих сад ... І затихло все під чарами кохання.. Нечутно заплакали роси, щоб блискати; прислухались квітки, щоб пахнути; випрямився лавр, розпахнувся кедр на чотири сторони і фонтан забив вище... (75).

As we can see, no explicit description takes place here. The emotions of the couple are reflected in the behaviour of nature. Changes in this behaviour signal the events of the encounter and its climatic ending. If this passage illustrates a Romantic's approach to the union of "man and nature," other

treatments of nature in the story are endowed with a typically decadent predilection for artifice and the exotic:

> Глибоко звисли униз повзучі ліяни ... Стояли непорушно тихі лаври, маґнолії зхилилися, кріпко держалися кактуси, і кедр... тихо ступали вони по морському золотому піску. Різьблені колони ярко блищали ... обіч широких мармурових сходів, що амфітеатром вели до колон, стояли великі вази з кущами червоних невиданих квіток. (72-73)

The themes and features I have discussed so far suggest that one could easily categorize Hnat Khotkevych as a decadent writer.

FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS

Decadence in Khotkevych's early prose involves more than themes and philosophical attitudes. In this section I will examine some of the devices deployed in *Poeziia v prozi* and point out the lexical and formal basis of decadence. I will build my analysis on the model introduced by Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj in "Ukrainian Symbolism and the Problem of Modernism." In this article, Ilnytzkyj investigates modernist poetry and argues for the coherence

of its "ideology, style, theme, and formal conventions."[70] Ilnytzkyj also outlines the recurring images and lexicon of Modernism that can be considered decadent.

At the outset, let me point out that Khotkevych's collection fits the general pattern of the "melancholy lyric, with its attendant modernist motifs: weariness; sadness; boredom; hopelessness."[71] The preeminent characteristic of *Poeziia v prozi* is the pessimistic mood of its characters. These characters are predominantly melancholics who find themselves in isolation, experiencing weariness, loneliness, sadness, boredom and hopelessness. The vocabulary used to describe these states of being is often repeated throughout the collection.[72] This is most evident in the stories "Osin'," "Bila bereza," and "Poeziia v prozi." In "Osin'," the protagonist is described as a lonely man who at the end of his life contemplates the purpose of his existence. His physical and emotional state is emphasised in the text by adjectives such as "solitary," "elderly," "unknown," and "alone":

> І тепер, в цю осінню ніч, коли він, *самотній*, *підстаркуватий*, *невідомий*, *єдиний* з тих, хто кінчає

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[70] Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj, "Ukrainian Symbolism and the Problem of Modernism," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* Vol. XXXIV No1-2, (March-June 1992): 129.

[71] Ilnytzkyj, 125.

[72] According to Ilnytzkyj, this lexicon is commonly used by modernists. See, Ilnytzkyj, 129.

> життя, не викликаючи нічиїх гірких сліз, нічиєї розпуки... ("Osin'" 113)

Other feature of his desperate state is sadness. Memories of the past bring sorrow to him and make him realize that life is coming to an end. His despondency is conveyed with the nouns "grief," "regrets," and "groans of weakness," and is reinforced with the verb "to cry":

> Отак і осінь життєва. Приходь зі своїм *смутком, жалями*! Приходь *немощами* й *стогонами безсилости*!...і так захотілося *плакать*, малими, діточими *сльозами*..." ("Osin'" 121)

Puzzled by the emptiness within himself ("пустка тепер у грудях ... камінь важенний"), the protagonist also experiences hopelessness. This is suggested by the "autumnal coldness" surrounding him and the "dimmed" look in his eyes:

> Бо не буде у мене більше таких вечорів у житті... Не буде... Не буде... Сиди, *остуженний холодом* осени, чоловіче, дивись *погаслими очима* на *погасле вугілля*, радій з вижитого знання і думай – навіщо ти родився? ("Osin'" 125)

Similar characteristics describe Mykola, the protagonist of "Bila Bereza." Preoccupied with the girl Halia, Mykola feels sad and hopeless because he does not know how to win her love. He is described as a "saddened," "quiet," and "resigned" man in pain:

> Але чогось *засмутився* юнак... Щось він *тихий-тихий* став і *покірний*... йде *блукати* кудись, куди очі дивляться. І зі *стогоном* шепоче... Душа *болить*. ("Bila bereza" 108)

After experiencing short-lived happiness with the girl, the melancholic Mykola is left to live alone in suffering. His suffering is emphasised by the verbs "to agonize" and "to endure [pain]": "Відірвав [Бог] половину серця і зоставив жити з другою, вічно *конати*, вічно *боліти*..." (109) Mykola's loneliness and hopelessness are underscored by the coldness of his bed: "А він далеко-далеко... вмираючи на своєму вбогому *холодному ліжку*..." (110-111). The "cold" bed in this passage is reminiscent of the autumnal coldness enveloping the old man in "Osin'."

Feelings of sadness also overcome the lyrical persona of "Poeziia v Prozi" whose grief is communicated through "tears" and "muffled sobbing": "*Сльози*... задушене *ридання*... *Смуток* чується навколо..." ("Poeziia v prozi" 145) Similarly, in "Chopin's Berceuse," the sorrow of the mother who hopes and wishes for a better future for her son is conveyed through images of her being overtaken by "sadness" and the need "to cry" over the "finality" of love:

> В душі якось невиразно *смутно* стало... і *плакать, плакать* хотілось... *Плакати* над *кінечністю* кохання, над недосконалістю властивого чуття, над безсилістю форми ("Chopin's Berceuse" 43).

In the collection, the predominantly dark and pessimistic words describing the melancholy feelings of various protagonists stand in sharp contrast to the lexicon Khotkevych employs when depicting ideal beauty. This is most evident in "Portret." Here, Ida's beauty is described as "unearthly," "illuminated by the light of gods," "eternal," and "undying":

> То було творення *неземне*, осяяне *світлом богів*... Вона ж була *красою*, єдиним з проявлень тієї *Вічної Краси*... *безсмертне* сотворіння...("Portret" 88-90).

In "Chopin's Berceuse," the harmonious union of two individuals leads them to create their own pristine "beauty":

> Тут панує прекрасне... Тут утворили люди собі свою красу. То краса чистого зору очей, освітлених любов'ю, то гармонія душ, що злились і доповнили одна другу... ("Chopin's Berceuse" 29)

In "Romans" the beauty of the female partner is "undying," "illuminated by silver light" and "sparkling":

> І тут серед... всіх її палючих *безсмертних красот*... нараз дорогим серебром *освітилися* коси дівочі. Граційозно-ніжним рухом впали вони геть на плечі, на *сяйливі* плечі - і з них, з тих *чудово-прекрасних* плечей поповзли по тканині... ("Romans" 71, 72).

Overall, the lexicon describing feelings of pain, tension, struggle, and passion repeats itself in Khotkevych's collection. These words can be grouped

into two semantic sets, the one "pessimistic" and the other "idealistic." Among the former, I include: "ридати," "плакати," "сльози"; "боліти," "конати," "стогнати," "біль"; "смуток," "сум," "жаль"; "самітність," "сам," "самотній," "самота"; "пустка," "пусто," "провалля"; "темний," "холодний," "погаслий." Among the latter, I include: "вічна краса," "вічно-прекрасна," "чудо-прекрасні," "вічно жива," "безсмертний"; "ідеал," "божественний," "неземний," "райський." The density of semantically related words appearing in each set, and their constant repetition throughout the collection generates and reinforces the pessimistic atmosphere characteristic of decadent works. Although the words that function within the "idealistic" group are not pessimistic, their fantastic dimension underscores that reality is laden with all that is not "eternal," "beautiful," "undying" or "unearthly."

Another modernist pattern noted by Ilnytzkyj is the use of binary structures.[73] This device is also employed by Khotkevych. In "Bila Bereza," for example, the short-lived *joy* of the protagonist is contrasted with the *pain* he experiences when he loses his beloved:

> О, щастя людське! Яке ти маленьке, яке ж коротесеньке! Але яке ж ти повне й сильне!..

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[73] Ilnytzkyj, 128.

> Але... скінчилося щастя... зоставив... вічно конати, вічно боліти...("Bila bereza" 109)

In "Portret" the *beauty* of the girl in the portrait contrasted with the *ugliness* of her corpse:

> ...Високо зачісане волосся відтіняло розкішшю темної корони все матового кольору обличчя. Горде, рівне чоло, рукою генія виточений із мрамору ніс, підборіддя, маленькі трохи сухі губи... Але найчарівніші, найбезумніші - то були очі...
>
> ...глянули з темряви уверх чорні ями замість очей... Голий череп вискалив зуби...("Portret" 84, 104)

The story "Osin'" simultaneously juxtaposes the protagonist's memories of the *past* and his *youth* with the *present* and his *old age*:

> І останній портрет узяв. Зима. Стоїть молодий белбас у кереї, у чорній шапці, на дубець обіперся... А що на обороті? "Зимо, зимо люта безсердечна зимо... А що ти принесеш мені? ... Ой, зимо, зимо... будуча зимо...
>
> Тоді була будуча, а тепер справжня... І вирвано з рук у мене інструмент... і серцем моїм хтось перекидається, і сміються з мене люди... ("Osin'" 121-122).

"Chopin's Berceuse" from the very beginning develops a number of oppositions as it contrasts the *harmony* and *naturalness* of a union between *two poor people* with the *artifice* of ceremonies involving *wealthy partners*:

> Не пишна, а убога скоріше обстановка. Не блищить бронза й кришталь, не заглушують вільного шуму перські килими... Не пишно по праці сідають за стіл

> господарі, не стоять батареями вина... Просто, убого навіть усе - і тихо-тихо, мов у тихому раю...Вони тихо поєднались...так тихо, що ніхто не затуляв вух від весільного гомону. І дзвони не брязкали... Запахом простих квіток, подихом вітру в розчинені двері обвіяним був їх союз... тихим подихом вітру весіннього... ("Chopin's Berceuse" 29-30)

In this story the opposition between a *passive* and an *active* existence is metaphorically represented by the movements of the mother's hands when she plays the piano:

> От рівно колишеться ліва рука ... це знаряддя усиплення, спокою рівнодушности. За смисл і ціль собі ставить сон, стан без рухів і завмерле життя; хоче приголомшувати однаковістю, хоче безжалісно вбивати кожний вільний запит і виривання з пут, хоче влити життя всіх фібрів в одну мірку... Краще живеться без штормів і бурь золотою серединкою...
>
> То ліва рука. А права ж... боже!.. Перли розсипались по сходах золотих і брєнять... Рожеві вінки посплітались... І в звуках тих... сонце вставало барвне блискучо, радісно закликало життя на землю і випрямило зігнуту росицею стеблину... ("Chopin's Berceuse" 35, 36)

Khotkevych, like other modernists,[74] deploys color as metaphor. For example, in "Bila bereza" the whiteness of the birch tree is harnessed to symbolize aspects of the human soul:

> Чого на всіх деревах зверху чорне, а на цьому *біле*? А це тому... що то *чисте* й *святе* дерево. Так і з

[74] Ilnytzkyj, 128.

> людьми: хто *чистий душею,* тому бог дасть *ясний* погляд, *тиху* розмову... ("Bila bereza" 107)

The color white also reflects the innocence of the unmarried girl: "Дала йому панну: *білу*, як лілію, *тиху*, як майовий ранок, і *чисту*, як світле, ясне сонце" (109). In contrast, the color black is marshalled to deal with negative aspects of human character: "А хто нечесний, у того *чорна* душа і понурий погляд" (109). In "Portret," on the other hand, black signifies death and is used in the description of the corpse: "...глянули з *темряви* уверх *чорні* ями замість очей..." ("Portret" 104).

According to Ilnytzkyj, "a central tenet in the poetics of both modernist and symbolists was 'mellifluousness' or 'musicality.'"[75] This feature is most evident in the collection's 'prose poem' -- "Poeziia v prozi" -- where assonance, consonance, rhymes and refrains perform an important function. For example, to create a musical effect Khotkevych relies on morphological rhymes ("Місяць на широк*ому* розлог*ому* небозводі, на квіт*частому*, на зір*частому*"(145) and the refrain "тихий вітер з гаю далекого...":

> *Тихий вітер з гаю далекого...* Місяць на широкому розлогому небозводі, на квітчастому, на зірчастому. Соловейко на орісі і зозуля на калині. Небесні чарівні

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[75] Ilnytzkyj, 126.

> звуки над заснулою землею, дивні запахи від садків чудових і – *тихий вітер з гаю далекого...* (145).

Another reccurring device in the collection is the fragmentation of sentences and paragraphs with the assistance of empty spaces and dotted lines. Such breaks have several functions. Often they serve to communicate indecision:

> Ще не рвуть ридання тіла, ще не тремтить воно усе, мов бурею зігнуте, але зараз, зараз розіллється море пекучого болю, зараз зірветься з чарівних вуст безумний
> протест.....
> .....
> ..... І піт холодний виступив у нього на чолі....("Osin'" 91)

Dotted lines also serve to signal the passing of time occurring between the transition of scenes:

> Вони пили, припавши устами до чаші, пили – і не думали, що може прийти час, коли вип'ється все і на дні позолоченого келиха зостанеться мутна гуща з гіркістю й неприємним запахом...
> .....
> .....
> Тихо приспала вона свого першого сина ("Chopin's Berceuse" 30).

Incomplete sentences often convey silence or the speechlessness of a protagonist:

> Білий причілок маленької хати, облитий сяйвом місяцевим... Чорна тінь, що руки заломивши, малюється на білій стіні... Сльози... задушене ридання... Смуток чується навколо і в серці... О,

сльози, сльози!.. І – тихий вітер з гаю далекого..." (145).

The formal aspects I have discussed give a glimpse into the innovations Khotkevych introduced in the collection *Poeziia v prozi*. Inasmuch as decadence was associated with "newness" and "innovation," it is safe to argue that Khotkevych's experiments with form, style, and lexicon reinforce the decadent nature of his themes and account for the harsh criticism he received from his contemporaries.

CONCLUSION

This study has tried to demonstrate that Ukrainian modernist writers, among them specifically Hnat Khotkevych, influenced by the European trends, took steps to create a more diverse Ukrainian literature. They rebelled against a half-century of domination by Positivism, Naturalism, Populism and Realism. They rose up against the prevailing conception that art must assume civic (i.e., social and political) responsibility. The Ukrainian Modernists proclaimed their right to create in uninhibited freedom and in step with Europe.

For the artist, the problem of the metaphysical tension between the individual and the universe became far more important than the responsibility of the individual to society. Artists restored to the subjective elements of art: they made their individual vision of the Absolute the fulcrum of their works. To discover who the artist was within the universe, the Modernists concentrated on new forms and new ways of writing. This led to the revival of poetry and the introduction of prose poetry. The system of literary devices placed emphasis on the symbol and metaphor which permitted a subjective interpretation of an image. The artist tried to answer philosophical questions,

analyze the psychology of the individual, and explored the unconscious world. Search for the 'new beauty' and manifestation of the principle of 'art for art's sake' became a principle theme in literature. The modernists introduced a new sensibility into Ukrainian literature and ultimately transformed the poetic taste of their public.

Ukrainian critics of the period broke this diverse variety down into various conventional categories: symbolism, decadence, and impressionism.[76] As my research reveals, decadence -- one of the modernist waves -- historically carried negative connotations of decline and deterioration, and not only within Ukrainian culture. Consequently, the term was rejected by contemporary critics such as Iefremov, Nechui-Levyts'kyi and Franko. Even the new modernist generation, including Hnat Khotkevych, who saw Ukrainian culture embarking on a new beginning, could not find any redeeming value either in its meaning or use.

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[76] Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj explains: "During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the word 'symbolism' appeared in the Ukrainian literary process with regularity. Not infrequently, the term 'decadence' also came into play. Curiously, neither expression entered the lexicon of criticism as a period designator, and today the era from approximately 1900 to 1914 is commonly known as 'Modernism.' The 'symbolist' nature of Ukrainian 'Modernism' survives in our literary consciousness, but more as intuition than as demonstrated fact. One reason 'modernism' may have eclipsed the term 'symbolism' is that the latter was affixed subsequently to a phenomenon in vogue between 1917 and 1919, i.e., during the years of the Central Rada and the Het'manate." See, Ilnytzkyj, 113.

Although this forced Hnat Khotkevych to deny the presence of decadence in his works, contemporaries were not incorrect in discovering thematic and formal aspects of decadence in *Poeziia v prozi*. The collection's novel themes and experimentation with form prove that the modernist generation embraced decadent features as a token of modernity and progress rather than a sign of decline. It also allows us to conclude that decadence, although repeatedly rejected by the critics, was eventually integrated within Ukrainian literature even if only an illegitimate part of modernism.

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